

4079 .A 44/4 d 6

S E R M O N

T O T H E S O C I E T I E S

F O R
Reformation of Manners;

Preach'd at
Salter's-Hall, July 1. 1728.

By O. HUGHES. *K*

Publsh'd at their Request.

L O N D O N :

Printed for EMANUEL MATTHEWS, at the
Bible in Pater-Noster-Row. 1728.

REFORM

SOCIETIES



1728

BY O. HUGHES

LONDON

Printed by J. W. Smith, 1728

TO the worshipful JUSTICES OF THE
PEACE, in and about the Cities of
London and Westminster, who coun-
tenance and encourage the Societies for
Reformation of Manners.

GENTLEMEN!

THE following discourse is publish'd at
the request of the Societies for reforma-
tion of manners. I beg leave to inscribe
it to you, whose activity and zeal in the cause of
virtue, gives you a title to every thing that is
wrote with a view to defend or promote the re-
forming designs.

Your zealous endeavours to suppress vice, by
executing the laws on daring transgressors, must
afford pleasure to your own minds upon reflecti-
on; and command the regard of all good men,
who cannot but be greatly affected to see wicked-
ness abound, notwithstanding all your laudable
attempts to put a stop to it.

You will persist, gentlemen, in this glorious
work: let not your zeal abate; act still upon
those noble principles, which have hitherto ani-
mated you. The honour of the great GOD, the
welfare of your country, and the recovery of the
wicked, should still invigorate your endeavours

DEDICATION.

to check vice and profaneness. The cause is the same that ever it was: the temper and manners of the age require its being carried forward as much as ever: And there are some considerations, which methinks should prevail upon you to exert your selves in the prosecution of this blessed work, more than ever.

The death of many of your brethren in the magistracy, who were eminently useful in encouraging the cause of reformation, should excite your most vigorous endeavours to put a stop to vice. Within the compass of a few years many worthy magistrates have been removed: and such strokes of providence should awaken your diligence in the faithful discharge of your office, upon a twofold account; both as they put you in mind of your own mortality; and as there are so many the fewer left to promote and carry on this good work.

Besides, there are many gentlemen who approve the cause, and your conduct so well, that they would gladly join with you in equal service to your country: if they were not prevented by a law, which does not admit their service upon any other terms than the violation of their consciences: a law which deprives our most graci-

* Sir Thomas Abney, Sir John Fryer, Bart. Sir Isaac Tillard, Sir Francis Forbes, and Sir Daniel Dolins, who adorned the magistracy.

DIED THAT MOIN

our sovereign King GEORGE of the useful labours of many good men, not only among protestant dissenters, but also of the established church; who apprehend the being obliged to take the sacrament as a qualification for a civil office; to be a prostitution of the most solemn ordinance in our holy religion. And in that view I confess I should not wonder, if the bishops and clergy themselves were the first and most zealous in endeavouring to procure the repeal of that act.

It is well known, moreover, that several gentlemen, who have the honour to be in the commission of peace, care not to act at all: and others, who act in some affairs, will give no assistance in this cause; so that instead of discharging their trust, they rather encourage vice, by not executing the laws upon the immoral and profane. What such gentlemen think of a future day of accounts, I know not.

I hope, however, you will not slacken your commendable industry, but with a firm and unshaken resolution will go on to be terrors to evil-doers, and a praise to them that do well. — And GOD almighty prosper you: may your endeavours to reform a vitious age be attended with desired success! may they be a means of deriving the divine blessing upon your selves and your families at present! And may the full reward be assigned you hereafter in that happy world, where
none

DEDICATION.

none of the blessed inhabitants shall need re-
forming!

*These are the fervent prayers of many; but of
none more sincerely than of,*

GENTLEMEN,

Your most humble Servant,

Aldermanbury,
July 8. 1728.

O. HUGHES.

PSALM

P S A L M CXIX. 158.

*I beheld the transgressors, and was
grieved.*

THE design of our meeting together this day is well known. It is to animate and encourage those of you, who have joined in societies for reforming a wicked and dissolute age; and to recommend the work of reformation to others, who have not yet engaged in it.

The cause, Sirs, is most glorious! no man should be either ashamed or afraid to appear in it. When wickedness abounds, when vice and irreligion prevail, it becomes every man, of whatever rank or character he be, to bear his testimony against them, and to exert himself to the utmost in endeavouring to prevent their growth and progress. All men should then account themselves obliged to *rise up for God against the evil-doers*; and to *stand up for him against the workers of iniquity* *. This the great God expects from all, who profess themselves his servants, or hope for his favour and acceptance.

Under the influence of this conviction, several worthy gentlemen agreed to enter into an association for this purpose; wisely judging, that private attempts would be insufficient to give a

check to growing wickedness, and that united force and counsels were most likely to bring about this desired end.

This work was first begun in the reign of King WILLIAM and Queen MARY of immortal memory. The proclamations and letters, which their Majesties published on this occasion, sufficiently demonstrate their royal hearts deeply affected with the great spread of immorality, and resolutely determined, if possible, to suppress it. Happy was it for these nations, that God raised up those glorious princes to rule over us, whose hearts were set upon the advancement of religion and virtue. Their accession to the throne was peculiarly seasonable; for, according to the histories of those times, it is judged, that this nation was then arriv'd to a most prodigious height of wickedness; religion sunk in its credit and reputation; immorality triumph'd, vice was fashionable; and through the sad corruptions of the two preceding reigns, the contagion was epidemical, and had spread itself amongst all ranks of persons; and sin was become no longer the object of shame, but of glory: In short, matters seem'd to be come to a crisis; that either wickedness or virtue must be suppress'd; for vice was now grown boisterous and outrageous, and a torrent of profaneness had broken in with an impetuous violence. Every one, who is acquainted with our *English* history, will vouch the truth of this.

It was high time, you'll say, to endeavour to stop this threatening evil; but how to effect it, was the difficulty: And considering the hazard that was run, and the manifest dangers and troubles they exposed themselves to, it was bravely done in those few gentlemen, who first united to oppose the wickedness of the times, to do what they could towards stemming the tide of vice; and who thus became (to their everlasting honour be it spoken) the founders of *reforming societies*; which, I hope, will be perpetuated as long as open wickedness is practis'd among us.

Since the rise of these societies, you have had many excellent sermons, from ministers of distinguish'd worth, both in the establish'd church, and out of it: they have all heartily concurr'd in assisting you to carry forward this good work, and have severally offer'd a variety of arguments to direct and animate you in this service. I wish to God we might once see them as heartily agreed in every thing else, that would tend to promote the honour, and advance the kingdom of Jesus Christ in the world.

I am well aware that nothing new can be expected from me, when so many men of great name and abilities have gone before me in this service: And upon this consideration I had declined complying with the request of those gentlemen, who invited me to it; were it not that my esteem and affection for this glorious work forbade me to be backward in contributing the most I could (how little soever that might be)

B to

to the promoting of it; and I wish, that what I have to offer may subserve this good design.

The words I have chosen for my text, will lead to several thoughts, which I apprehend may help to encourage and confirm you in the laudable work you have undertaken: they inform us, how *David* was affected with the iniquity of the times in which he lived; *he beheld the transgressors, and was grieved.* In this, as well as in many other things, *David* should be consider'd as an example to good men in all future time.

It is doubtful when the hundred and nineteenth Psalm was penn'd; the title does not inform us, nor is there any certain criterion to judge by. I apprehend it was compos'd in *David's* advanced years; and may be consider'd as a collection of his experiences and observations. In the general course of his life he had closely adher'd to the word of God; and he had found it of singular service both to comfort and counsel him in the different scenes through which he had pass'd: and now being near the close of life, the good man gathers up his remarks, and in a most exact * manner puts them

* Those who can read this Psalm in the original, must admire the accuracy of its composition: it plainly appears to have been no hasty performance, but a work of time and care: it consists of *twenty two* parts, according to the number of letters in the *Hebrew* alphabet; each part begins with a different letter in order; and the *eight* verses which compose each part, begin all with the same letter that stands at the head of the part. This was so contriv'd, possibly, to assist the memory: but however that be, it is plain it was the product of thought and care.

toge-

together, that they might be useful to others in all after ages of the church.

DAVID in the course of his life had met with a variety of providences; he had his changes, it may be, as much as most men; but in all he had sensible evidence of the divine favour, and in the main his heart was right with GOD. He had his failings as well as others, and some miscarriages of a very heinous nature too, but yet upon the whole, *he was a man after GOD's own heart.* However he might be sometimes overtaken, it appears from the history of his life, that he had a prevailing regard for the honour of GOD, a solicitous concern for promoting religion, and discountenancing immorality. He used his influence and authority for these glorious purposes; and nothing more impress'd his tender heart, than to find his endeavours fail of desired success. He had a rooted aversion against sin, and as he would not allow it in *himself*, so neither could he behold it in *others* without reluctance and concern: *I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved.*

We may in these words consider DAVID speaking, either as a *King*, or as a *good man* only. In these two capacities, I apprehend, he will be found a fit example both for magistrates and for private persons in the blessed cause of reformation.

It will not be amiss to carry both these views in our thoughts; while we are meditating upon this subject.

We find there were *transgressors* in DAVID'S time. No age has been entirely free from such. Sin made an early entrance into the world: and though God has evidenced his resentment against it by several terrible judgments executed upon mankind (witness the universal deluge in *Noah's* time; the sending fire from heaven to destroy many large and populous cities at once; the cutting off his ancient people *Israel* from being a nation; and scattering them upon the face of the earth, and the like) yet the hearts of men are so corrupted by the iniquity of the fall, that they are *set in them to do evil*: and we must not expect to see sin entirely extirpated, till the earth it self shall be burnt up. Sin and this world will have an end together: and so far is sin from losing ground, or growing weaker by age, that I wish there were not so much reason to say, it every day becomes more strong and impetuous.

DAVID *beheld* the transgressors of his day. By which phrase I understand more, than barely that he saw them, that he knew there were such, and that their wicked actions came within his observation. The term denotes, that he spent many a serious thought upon the conduct of the wicked, he took particular notice of them, he carefully consider'd their behaviour, and revolved it frequently in his mind, till his heart was deeply affected.

He was *grieved*: he felt an inward concern of soul, his tender spirit was moved at the wickedness

edness he beheld; he laid it to heart; he could not stand by as an unconcerned spectator of the iniquities which were practis'd in the world: he was *grieved*. Grief is an inward passion or affection of the soul, arising from a reflection upon something melancholy or afflictive. This passion DAVID found was excited in him by the wickedness of men in a very extraordinary degree; so that he compares his tears, shed on this occasion, to rivers: *rivers of water run down mine eyes* *. And in another place † he says, *horror hath taken hold upon me*. The good man was in a vast disorder and concern: the original word, which we translate *horror*, signifies a *tempest* or *storm*. There was, it is plain, a vehement commotion and ruffle in his mind: sometimes he wept bitterly, at other times he was in a kind of tremor, seized with horror and surprise: But let the outward shape, in which it appear'd, vary ever so much, the inward affection remain'd the same; he *grieved*, his heart was impressed with an holy concern at the impieties of those among whom he lived.

The general proposition to be insisted on from these words is, that *it is the property and character of a good man, to grieve at the transgressions of the wicked*.

Whatever rank or place he fills up in the world, if he be a truly good man, he will find himself thus affected, when he *beholds the transgressors*: the growth of vice will excite this pas-

* Ver. 136, of this Psalm.

† Ver. 53.

sion in the soul of every pious and good man. How was Lot affected with the *unlawful deeds* of the wicked Sodomites? The sacred text expresses it very strongly; *That righteous man, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day* *. Thus we read of Ezra, that his concern on the like account was very great; *he did eat no bread, nor drink water, for he mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away* †. In like manner Jeremiah says, *My soul shall weep in secret places for your pride, and mine eye shall weep sore and run down with tears* ‡. The apostle Paul's spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city of Athens wholly given to idolatry, or full of idols **. What was the object of pleasure to others, he could not bear the sight of without a *paroxysm* of sorrow; his spirit was exasperated and exceedingly grieved. Instances might be multiplied, to shew that the saints of God in all ages mourn over the vices of the times in which they live, it is their character and property. The example of our blessed Saviour is what I will only mention farther. We read that our Lord *looked round about him with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts* §: The obstinacy and perverseness of the Jews gave him just cause of resentment, but it excited his pity and sorrow together with his anger. How full of tenderness and compassion was his conduct, when he

* 2 Pet. ii. 8.

† Ezra x. 6.

‡ Jer. xiii. 17.

** Acts xvii. 16.

§ *Παροξυσμὸς*

§ Mark iii. 5.

view'd the city *Jerusalem*, a city that had most injuriously treated him: *When he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, if thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace: but now they are hid from thine eyes* *. This last is the perfect pattern; and from it we infer, that to be grieved at the sins of mankind is a Christ-like disposition and temper, a conduct very suitable to the disciples of the holy *Jesus*.

In whatever situation men are in life, if they partake of this spirit, they will discover it in suitable endeavours to check the prevalence of vice: thus did *DAVID*, both in his publick and private capacity. You all know what resolutions he made with respect to his conduct, when he should come to the full possession of the regal authority; he would do every thing in his power to discourage immorality in his own court, and wherever else his influence reach'd †. I wish all princes would follow so lovely an example! If they did, we should soon see the world much amended; profaneness and vice would then cease to be so fashionable and in such repute as now they are. If *DAVID* had only shed a few tears, and griev'd over the transgression of the wicked, without endeavouring to put a stop to it; his tears and all his expressions of grief would have been censured as artificial and pretended, or at least as not flowing from those noble springs, to which we justly ascribe his re-

* Luke xix. 41, 42.

† See Psalm ci.

sentments :

sentments: for where this inward grief is real and genuine, springing from right and generous principles, it will discover it self in outward acts, disposing the good man to do every thing in his power towards suppressing the evil which he laments and mourns over. And I'll venture to say, that every man has it in his power, whatever his circumstances in the world are, to do something towards preventing the spread and increase of vice and immorality.

Let us in the farther prosecution of this subject, enquire into these two things, *viz.*

I. In what outward acts will a sincere concern for the wickedness of mankind discover it self?

II. What are the principles which give rise to this concern, and influence the good man to express it in such ways?

After having offer'd to your serious consideration some hints under each of these heads, I will close with a few remarks by way of application.

I. In what outward acts will a sincere concern and grief for the wickedness of mankind express it self?

In the general let it be observed, that a good man, whose heart is deeply affected with the prevalence of vice, will stick at no labour, nor trouble, but will do all he can to suppress it: he will discountenance immorality to the utmost
of

of his ability, according to the station and rank in which the providence of God has placed him. But more particularly,

1. He will take care, that his own life shall be so regularly conducted, as to give no countenance to vice, but to be a standing reproach to the wickedness of the age and place in which he lives.

Those who are truly grieved at the sins of others, will be very cautious of themselves. Example is more powerful than precept; especially the examples of persons in high places, and in advanced circumstances. Their fellow-creatures look up to see how rich and great men live, and generally form themselves upon their model. For this reason it would be a desirable thing to see the great become truly good, or those who are good become great. Under the conviction of this, the honourable *House of Commons* address'd the most glorious King WILLIAM, in the following remarkable words: * " Since the
 " examples of men in high and publick stations
 " have a powerful influence upon the lives of
 " others; we do most humbly beseech your Majesty, that all vice, profaneness, and irreligion
 " may in a particular manner be discouraged in
 " all those, who have the honour to be employ'd near your royal person; and in all
 " others, who are in your Majesty's service, by sea and land: — and that your Majesty would,

* Address of the *Commons* to K. William, for the suppressing profaneness and vice, 1697.

"upon all occasions, distinguish men of piety
"and virtue, by marks of your royal favour."

It would have a vast influence towards the reformation of a nation, did the supreme rulers act according to this advice.

1. The truly pious and good man will bear his constant testimony against vice and profaneness, by the unblameableness of his own conversation; and will let the wicked know, that he sincerely grieves at the sins of mankind, by not allowing his own *soul to come into the secrets* of the immoral and profane. Every man may in this way evidence his resentments against vice, and those in the highest ranks of life are peculiarly obliged to do so.

2. The good man will take all proper occasions to plead and protest against wickedness, advising and admonishing the vicious of the evil consequences of their immoral courses.

3. In this world there is an unavoidable commerce between the wicked and the good. Whenever therefore the good man falls into company with the vicious and profane, he will watch for a convenient opportunity to throw in something in conversation, that may recommend religion, or expose the evil and folly of vice. If his heart be truly affected and grieved, *out of the abundance of it his mouth will speak* for God, and plead the cause of virtue. Every man should thus bear his testimony against the immoralities of those with whom he converses.

But the *Magistrate* has a peculiar advantage frequently, of insinuating good thoughts of virtue and religion into the minds of the wicked, and of saying something which may tend to abate their affection to vice. *Nehemiah*, we are told, *contended with the nobles of Judah*, and remonstrated against their *profaning the Sabbath-day**: he argued and pleaded with them the danger they ran by such practices, and put them in mind what had been the consequences of the like evil courses in the days of their forefathers. A remonstrance against vice made by a person in authority, will probably impress and strike a wicked mind, that has before been perfectly deaf to all the advice and reasonings of private friends: especially when the person admonished has laid himself open to the lash of the law; then a word spoken in season on the side of virtue and religion, may sometimes answer better purposes, than the mere inflicting the deserved punishment on the offender.

The *ministers of religion* are likewise particularly obliged to express their grief in this manner for the dissoluteness of the age and place in which they live. 'Tis our duty to plead the cause of God and religion, and to do what we can to convince those, who oppose themselves. We are to set our selves to destroy the kingdom of Satan, by representing to the wicked the misery of being his servants: we ought therefore to paint vice in the most disagreeable, that is,

* Nehem. xiii. 17.

in its own proper colours; and should recommend virtue and religion as the most lovely and amiable things in the world; for such they truly are: We should inforce the practice of godliness by the arguments of the gospel, and which are the strongest and most attracting; and by terrors fetch'd from thence likewise, we should endeavour to drive the sinner out of the paths of irreligion and vice. With a resolute firmness of mind we should attend to these things, both in publick ministrations, and in our private conferences with mankind.

3. The good man will discover his abhorrence of sin, and his grief at it by reproving the wicked.

This is a duty of charity, which every man owes to his neighbour. We are *not to suffer sin upon our brother* *. I wish this duty was more generally practis'd; but there is a culpable modesty which prevails upon most persons so far, as to make them backward to the performance of it. I allow that reproof ought to be managed with great tenderness and discretion: Much compassion should be mixed with it: And it may be, scarce any social duty requires so much care in the discharge of it, in order to its answering the desired end. But this is no argument for omitting the duty; 'tis only a reason to make us more careful to discharge it in a right manner.

* Levit. xix. 17.

The reproving a man for his vices, supposes him to be a criminal; and that supposition is so disagreeable, that it oftentimes makes the sinner *become our enemy*, merely *because we tell him the truth*. There must therefore be a great deal of prudence used, both with respect to the *time* and the *manner* of reproving.

As to the *time*; it should be when the sinner is calm, and in a temper disposed to listen to what is said: This is most likely sometimes immediately after the fact is committed; or at other times will best answer, when the passion is subsided. No general rule is to be fix'd for this: prudence must direct, as things occur. There is one thing however, I believe, may be determin'd at once; that the best time to reprove a vicious man is, when he is alone; for if company be present, the only effect to be expected is to make him ashamed at that time; but his resentment against the reprover, for exposing him, will prevent his attending to the matter of the reproof.

As to the *manner*, it ought always to be with great tenderness and compassion, so as may most likely convince offenders, that it does not arise from a humour of finding fault, nor a desire of reproaching, nor from any ill-will to them; but from a real desire of their welfare, and a hearty concern for the honour of God and religion in the world. Severe reproofs against sin should be mix'd with love and good-will to the sinners them-

themselves; and then they are most likely to be successful *.

4. Good men will farther discover their grief at the iniquity of mankind, by bringing the wicked to punishment, if they can no other wise work upon them. The gentle methods of admonition, warning, and reproof ought first to be used; but if the sinner appears incorrigible, justice must then take place, and every man should think himself obliged to bring the offender to condign punishment.

We must under this head particularly distinguish between the magistrate and the private person.

There are two things more peculiarly incumbent on *the rulers or magistrates* of any nation, in order to the suppressing vice, and putting a stop to the spreading of outrageous wickedness.

The *first* is, to take care that good laws are enacted to that purpose. The law of God forbids the practice of sin, and has threatened tremendous penalties on the impenitent transgressor: Notwithstanding this, there are those who fear not God, but boldly venture on the violation of his precepts; these sinners, it may be, will be check'd by a strict law of the land, and if

* Some men, when they see occasion to find fault, do it with such a supercilious air, and with so manifest an appearance of a peevish ill-natur'd disposition; that it cannot, according to human nature, be expected the sinner will be otherwise affected by it, than to disregard the reproof, and despise the person who gives it.

not

not altogether reclaim'd, will probably be kept within some bounds, and will be less boisterous and impetuous in the gratifying their vile lusts. The legislative power therefore of every nation, should enact proper laws enforced with penalties, to prohibit all open wickedness. This has so generally appeared fit, that (I believe) there never was a civilized nation altogether destitute of laws, framed for the encouragement of virtue, or the suppression of open vice. The *Roman* state had many good laws of this kind, to which severe penalties were annex'd. But if we search the records of all nations, I am apt to think we shall not find in any of them such an ample provision of excellent laws against irreligion and wickedness, as our own nation abounds with. Our lawgivers, it must be own'd, have enacted various laws to terrify the evil-doer, and to retrieve the declining interest of virtue; and in order to secure the observation of them, they have annex'd sanctions to those laws: so that it is not for want of good laws, that we are not become a reformed people. If laws could have executed themselves, profaneness and vice had long ago been put out of countenance, if not altogether banished out of the land: But this cannot be look'd for without something farther.

The *second* thing therefore expected from the civil magistrate towards the suppressing vice, is to take care that these good laws are well executed; for otherwise they are of no force or significance. The sword of justice is by the
eternal

eternal King, the sovereign Lord of all, put into the hands of the civil magistrate; *he is the minister of G O D, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doth evil* *. If the magistrate therefore refuses to use his authority in the cause of virtue, and will not put the laws against immorality into force, he becomes criminal, as he so far *bears the sword in vain*; he does not act up to his character, which is, that he should be *a terror to evil-doers*; nor does he answer the great end for which magistracy in general was at first appointed, or for which the sword was put into his hands, and power was lodged with him; namely, to secure the observation of the laws, and to prevent their being openly violated. — It is of the last consequence to a nation to have good magistrates to execute the laws; such as have a regard to religion and virtue, and who out of a principle of conscience, will exert themselves against impiety, by punishing the guilty. The *Romans* took special care in the choice of their magistrates, and in no one instance discover'd their wisdom more than in this. Who would be willing to put a sword into a madman's hand? Nothing but mischief could reasonably be expected in such a case: It is equally imprudent and dangerous to make those the guardians of the laws, who are themselves lawless and disobedient. I wish with all my heart, there was as much reason to congratulate our nation upon the virtue and faithfulness of

the
Rom. xiii. 4.

the

the magistrates, as upon the goodness of the laws. But I fear there is still too just ground for the remark, which was made by the Honourable House of *Commons* in an address to King WILLIAM; who speaking of profaneness and immorality, add these words, "which chiefly by the neglect and ill example of too many magistrates are, like a general contagion, diffused and spread throughout the kingdom *," &c." If men of abandon'd, profligate lives, who neither fear God, nor regard man, are put into the magistracy, the work of reformation will soon be at a stop; for it must be with a very ill grace indeed, that a magistrate can execute the law upon a criminal for swearing, or cursing, for lewdness, or debauchery, for profaning the Lord's-day, or any other open wickedness, when he knows himself chargeable with the like crimes, and it may be in an higher degree too. It may much rather be expected (and you have found it so more than once) that such magistrates will discharge the offender, and instead of executing the good law upon him, will brow-beat the informer, and send him away with an angry look, if not with opprobrious reflections.

These two things peculiarly concern the magistrate, as to vice and profaneness, *viz.* making good laws, and taking care that they are executed well: But magistrates may be faithful in both respects, and yet the work of reformation not greatly advance.

* *Commons address to King William, ut supra.*

There is therefore a duty incumbent on all *private* persons, in order to carry forward this glorious work. Here the business of *informing* comes under consideration. It is a name of harsh sound in the ears of many persons; and those who have engaged in the work, have been loaded with base reproaches. Nevertheless, it is easy to prove it a necessary duty, and all the friends of virtue should think themselves obliged this way to oppose the growth of vice. It cannot be expected that the magistrate's power will be very significant in the suppressing of immoralities, if private persons do not lend their kind assistance. The magistrate can be witness but to a small part of the vice which is committed; and it will be but seldom that he can punish the profane and irreligious, if he is to see only with his own eyes, or hear only with his own ears, and may not be allow'd to receive information from others. The main stress of the reforming design seems almost to depend on the faithfulness and diligence of private persons, in giving informations against the vicious: and should all determine to forbear this, it is easy to tell what would be the consequence; vice would go unpunish'd, and the profligate sinner would grow bold in his wickedness.

This then is another outward expression of the good man's grief at the wickedness of others; he will, when gentler methods have no effect, do all he can, according to his station in the world, to bring the criminal to punishment. I add,

5. The

5. The good man expresses his *grief* on this occasion, by fervent prayers to God.

This is a way which all good men, whatever their circumstances are, can use: for the throne of grace is open to them all; and those who scarce have it in their power to help forward the blessed work of reformation any other way, may assist and be serviceable in this respect. And I doubt not but the prayers of good men have contributed very much to the success of this cause, as far as it is already carried. 'Tis God alone that is able effectually to suppress the wicked: he can send forth his Spirit and convert them; or if they will not attend to his motions, God can stretch out his arm and destroy them; or by his over-ruling providence can discover their wickedness, and bring them to suffer the just deserts of their folly.

The petitions most proper to address to God, in reference to this glorious cause, are such as these.

That God would reclaim the wicked from the error of their ways: that by the influences of his Spirit he would effectually convert and turn their hearts.

That God would pardon and forgive them all the former iniquities of their lives, and receive them to his mercy upon their repentance, according to the declarations of the Gospel.

That God would put a stop to the growth of guilt, and would bring *the wickedness of the wicked to an end* *.

* Psal. vii. 9.

That God would spirit up our rulers and magistrates, that they may be faithful in using their authority to the encouragement of virtue, and the subduing of vice.

That God would restrain the wrath of the wicked; and take under his special protection all those, who expose themselves to manifest dangers in prosecuting this work.

That God would own and bless all endeavours of every kind, which are used in order to bring about a national reformation. And

That God would graciously accept, and abundantly reward all those pious souls, who willingly offer themselves to this service, with the blessings of this and another world.

In petitions of this nature all good men will concur; and let all the people say, *Amen.*

II. I am now to enquire, what the principles are which give rise to this concern, and influence the good man to express it in such ways.

There are three things which I would here offer to your consideration, as the proper principles, which influence good men thus to grieve at the growth of vice; and these, I persuade myself, you are actuated by in your attempts to promote a reformation of manners in this degenerate, dissolute age.

I. An high regard for the honour of God.

The apostolical canon is, *whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God* *: This must be the go-

* 1 Cor. x. 31.

verning end and principle of all our actions: and this is what makes the good man grieve to see abounding wickedness, and do what he can to suppress it. *David* in this Psalm frequently refers to the troubles and persecutions he had been under; and no doubt he resented the injurious treatment he met with: but the good man's concern seems more to be for the breach of the divine law, than for any detriment arising to himself. He was grieved to see men in defiance to the divine authority, break the law of God: This he himself gives as a principal reason for his concern, *because they kept not thy word*. The good man has a deep veneration for the laws of God, and a profound reverence for his Majesty: in virtue of this, he is never more sensibly troubled, than when he sees insolent sinners openly affront God, by boldly violating his righteous precepts: and his zeal for God's honour will make him do what he can to bring the offenders to punishment. 'Tis recorded to the honour of *Phinehas*, and God took it well at his hands, that being *zealous for GOD's sake*, he executed judgment upon *Zimri* and *Cosbi* *. When the honour of God lies at stake, or is any way infringed, the good man grieves, and, like old *Eli*, his *heart trembles*.

The honour of God is evidently struck at by the dissolute and debauch'd lives of the drunkard and unclean, by the shocking oaths and curses of the common swearer, by the profanation of

* Numb. xxv. 11, &c. See Psal. cvi. 30.

his holy day, and by the spreading of vice and irreligion: this the good man cannot behold without an inward grief, and this puts him on trying all possible methods to rectify matters. And all who have any regard to God, will be concerned to do what in them lies to prevent such dishonour to his Name, and such contempt to his Authority. Can a child of an ingenuous temper stand unconcerned, when he hears his tender father affronted? No, his resentment will rise, and put him upon methods to vindicate his father's honour. Thus the horrid curses and profane swearing, which are so frequent amongst us, grieve the good man, as they vilify the majesty of his heavenly Father; and no wonder that he should endeavour to make the daring sinner smart for his folly: I rather wonder, that these things are so patiently tolerated, and that more offenders of this kind are not punish'd.

2. A real concern for the welfare of the community, of which he is a member, is another principle upon which the good man's grief at the wickedness of the world is founded: and as a true friend to the society, he does what he can to stop the growth of it.

The profligate and profane will scarce allow it; but 'tis certainly true, that good men who attempt a reformation in the place where they live, are the best friends to the publick.

A truly pious and good man considers he was not born merely for himself, and therefore abhors selfish views; he aims at general good, he
seeks

seeks the good of the land to which he belongs: 'twas *David's* resolution, *I will seek thy good, oh Jerusalem* *. Upon this foot every good man is a publick blessing: by his *prayers* he often prevails with God for mercy to his country, and is a means of warding off impending judgments: by his *example* and *advice* he recommends virtue, and casts a reproach on irreligion: and by his *exerting himself* vigorously in the cause of reformation, and bringing to punishment obstinate offenders, he most effectually promotes the common welfare. However strange this may seem in the opinion of dissolute and vitious persons; it may easily be proved, if we only consider the vast prejudice prevailing immoralities are to any nation; and by consequence, he who attempts to put a stop to the growth of vice, does the community the greatest service.

Sin is not only a *reproach to any people* †; but often destroys a nation: *a city is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked* ‡. Wickedness has a twofold tendency to ruin any society, both a moral and a natural tendency.

1. A *moral* tendency; as it exposes a community to the wrath of God, and awakens him to judgment. Oh what havock has sin made in publick societies, as well as brought mischief on particular persons! If vice and profaneness are openly practis'd with impunity, and no care is taken to check and restrain the daring sinner; whatever crimes are thus committed become national; and

* Psal. cxxii. 9.

† Prov. xiv. 34.

‡ Prov. xi. 11.

the society must expect that God will arise to plead his own cause; since there are none in it, who will *stand up for him against the evil-doers*. Particular offenders often are permitted to go on in sin, without feeling the resentment of God in this world; because there is another state in which divine justice will avenge itself upon them. But communities are dissolved with this world, and as such cannot be reckon'd with hereafter: and therefore publick judgments are now to be expected, when publick vices are tolerated. The histories of several nations will confirm this observation: Especially if we examine the conduct of divine providence towards the *Jewish* nation, which was God's peculiar people, we shall find that when vice abounded, and no care was taken to suppress and punish it, then God arose to judgment; he not only withdrew his protection, but frequently deliver'd them into the hands of their enemies, or sent some desolating evils upon them. The *Psalmist's* remark has been verified in more than one of the nations of the earth; he (*i. e.* GOD) *turneth a fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein* *. The wicked are the most formidable enemies any nation can have: the good are its best friends, as they do what they can to prevent national judgments, and to obtain of GOD national blessings.

2. Publick vice has a *natural* tendency to ruin any nation. Impiety and immorality tend in their

* *Psal.* cvil. 34.

very natures to sink a nation into contempt and misery. And when these are not discouraged, what evils may we not expect? The utmost confusion and disorder must be the necessary effect of unrestrained vice. There is no nation under heaven can furnish us with a more remarkable instance of this than the *Roman* state: which whilst it continued virtuous, made a great figure in the world, was raised to the highest degree of glory; but when once luxury and vice had spread themselves into the several ranks of people, the glory departed from them, their strength was gone, their spirits softened by debauchery; civil wars arose at home, and the sword of foreign enemies at length utterly overthrew them.

Where vice prevails, the bands of government must soon be dissolved, riots and disorders will ensue, the spirits of a nation will be enfeebled, and they will become an easy prey to any invading enemy; witness the known story of a King of *Assyria*, who thought it rather the easier way to overcome the city of *Babylon*, by sending in players and lewd women to debauch it, than to invade it with a mighty army; and he answer'd his end effectually. Thus *Balaam* projected to insnare the *Israelites* with the daughters of *Midian*. And thus I doubt not was the contrivance of *Rome* and Hell, in the reigns before the happy Revolution, to debauch the nation (as they had it may be to the greatest de-

gree ever known, when your glorious design was first set on foot) that so they might enslave us and send in popery with all its cursed retinue. The *Bishop of London* has made the same remark, with respect to the *masquerades* being introduced among us by the embassadors of a prince, who was then pursuing measures to subject us to popery and tyranny *. When men become unbridled in their lusts, they will cowardly submit to any burden, which men of tyrannizing spirits would impose upon them.

Or it may be, unrestrained lusts may take another turn, and bring the members of a publick society into a state of war among themselves; they won't stand in need of foreign enemies to invade them; but they will *bite and devour one another*, till they *be consumed one of another* †.

3. A compassionate tenderness for the welfare of the wicked themselves, is another principle, upon which the good man acts, in discovering his resentment and grief at the growth of vice and profaneness.

The sacred scripture teaches us to account that man a *hater of his brother, who suffers sin upon him* ‡. And indeed is it not hatred in effect, to stand by unconcerned, and see a fellow-

* Sermon to the Societies, 1723.

† Gal. v. 15.

‡ Levit. xix. 17.

creature going on in courses which I know will be his eternal ruin, and at the same time I take no steps to prevent it? What would you think of such a conduct in another case? Suppose I see a man attempt to take away his own life, would it not be barbarous in me to stand still, and not endeavour to save him? Certainly it would be interpreted unnatural cruelty, and a conduct no way reconcileable to the great law of love; should I not do what I could to prevent my brother from taking away his *natural* life. The barbarity is unspeakably greater in the other case; in as much as the unhappy wretch exposes himself to the wrath of GOD, and to everlasting misery, by persisting in the practice of vice. Mere compassion would surely prompt us to do any thing in our power, to turn a soul out of the way to hell. Let vicious men put what construction they please upon the good man's exerting himself against their vices; it certainly is in him an instance of most real kindness, and the best way of expressing his charity. The good man loves the *persons*, tho' he abhors the vices, of the wicked: he would, if possible, destroy *these*, in order to save their souls.

If it be said, that grieving at their sins, praying for them, setting a good example, reproving and admonishing them, may indeed be evidences of good-will to the wicked; but how can bringing them to punishment be any argument of affection and compassion to them? The reason is obvious,

because correction and restraints are sometimes necessary, in order to bring a wicked man to consideration; (however improper they may be in the case of mistaken opinions;) he will hearken to no instruction or admonition, but the *rod and reproof* only will *give wisdom*. Now how unpleasant soever methods of severity may be to flesh and blood; yet they are merciful, when the sinner by them is reclaimed from his evil ways, and prevented from running desperately on the eternal ruin both of soul and body; and as such methods have a tendency to bring about this effect, they must be interpreted as proceeding from a real hearty concern for the welfare of the sinner. And this is one main principle, which influences the good man thus to exert himself in the glorious cause of virtue and religion against vice and immorality.

A P P L I C A T I O N.

1. We should take occasion to lament the wickedness of the land. It is an argument of a good heart to be grieved at the sight of transgressors: and have we not cause to mourn over the vices of the age in which we live? The oaths and curses, the drunkenness and lewdness, the contempt of religion which abounds in our day, call for pity and compassion; they should affect our hearts, and excite us to
do

do what we can to put a stop to the growth of them.

2. Let us expostulate with the wicked, who thus grieve the holy soul. What moving language may we use with them, when there is any prospect of success! What means the *profane swearer*, whose tongue speaks only the language of hell, by all those volleys of oaths and curses, which come as thick out of his mouth as words? Dost thou think that God will always *hold thee guiltless*, tho' he has expressly declared the contrary? Art thou an equal match for God, that thou venturest thus to affront his Majesty? Or what dost thou expect will be the consequence of falling into his hands, that thou still multipliest provocations against him? What means the *drunkard*, the *unclean*, the *profaner of the sabbath*, by flying in the face of heaven, as if the terrible day of the Lord would never come; or as if they thought they could then stand, tho' their doom is so explicitly declared in the records of truth? — What! have you no regard for God? No desire to promote his honour? No dread of offending him? — What are you no ways concerned for the nation to which you belong, but do what you can to bring ruin upon it? — If neither of these considerations will make thee forbear thy sins; let me ask farther; Do you not know you have souls to be saved? Or have you no regard to them? Will a bed in hell be soft? Or is it
easy

easy and pleasant to dwell with everlasting burnings?

3. How criminal are those, and far from the true Christian temper of soul, who are unconcerned at the wickedness of the times and places in which they live!

The ministers of religion, who can see the growth of vice without any concern, fall under reproof here: and so do indolent magistrates, to whom the execution of the laws is committed, but they look on and see vice triumphing upon the ruins of virtue, and don't so much as attempt to prevent its increase.

I add, if such are to be blamed; much more those of *either* character, who are themselves vitious; and by the irregularity of their own lives are continually increasing the stock of national guilt.

4. How sad a case is it, when men instead of grieving at the wickedness of the world, make a banter, a jest and mock of sin! It was an odd temper in *Democritus*, to be always laughing at the follies of his fellow-creatures: *Heraclitus* surely was more properly affected with them, when he continually wept over them. The merry satyrists may be preferred, if we should give in to some celebrated notions of ridicule; but the *mourning philosopher* certainly discover'd the best temper: his behaviour argued a fine spirit, and would have had the applause of a more grave and serious age, when the

the poet was clapp'd for that beautiful expression: "I am a man, and so think my self concerned in all human affairs*", and not unconcerned in any thing that refers to mankind." Good men are more disposed to compassion than raillery and ridicule; especially where the follies they observe, have a tendency to real mischief. It gives them sensible trouble to see men in open defiance of the divine authority, act such a part as must expose their own persons and their country to God's vengeance.

5. How criminal are they, who instead of grieving at the transgressors, rather set themselves to incourage and promote vice.

There are those, whose very business it seems to be, to lead others into wicked courses; they draw the unwary youth from one scene of vice to another; till at last he can find the way without the assistance of his guides, and even vies with them in the practice of iniquity.

Under this head I will venture to place all those unfaithful magistrates, who will not punish transgressors, will not exert themselves to suppress vice, but let the violated law be unexecuted. By this means they give encouragement to vice; for the wicked will grow bold in sin, and be harden'd in his impious practices,

* Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto.

Ter.
he'll

he'll be prompted to go on in vicious courses, when he finds the laws lie dormant, and they may be violated with impunity. — 'Tis not easy to imagine what aggravated guilt the unfaithful magistrate lies under: — but we may be assured the King of kings who knows the extent of his guilt, will award him proportionable punishment, when he comes to enquire into his criminal conduct.

6. How deservedly should they be applauded, who do what they can towards reforming a wicked age!

Every man is to be commended for shewing a zeal against vice; in doing so he acts the part of a faithful servant to GOD, a kind friend to the nation, and a compassionate well-wisher to the good of the wicked themselves, whose iniquity he opposes; and in every view he merits respect.

And now if every man in his private capacity is expected to do what he can to suppress the vice he laments; it would be very strange, if there were any harm in good mens combination to this purpose. There may indeed be accidental ill effects of such a pious confederacy; but I hope that is no more an objection in this case, than it is in many others; the best things being liable to abuse. While there is frailty in good men, and while the wicked continue in the world, no good design can be carried on but under some disadvantage. Pas-
sion

tion will mix it self with zeal; and sometimes interest too; and villains will, if possible, thrust in, where there is the prospect of any advantage: But shall we for *Peter's* intemperate heat, or *Judas's* treachery, condemn the best society that ever the world saw? Or shall we discourage the best designs, because the managers of them are not perfect themselves, nor have the gift of discerning spirits to prevent their being betray'd by others?

By this I am led particularly to address myself to those worthy gentlemen, who compose the societies for reformation of manners in the cities of *London* and *Westminster*. And before I put an end to this discourse, I beg they would allow me to offer to their consideration a few hints both by way of counsel and encouragement.

Your design, Sirs, is very laudable: it argues a noble and generous spirit in you to undertake so good a work — To attempt the reformation of a wicked age, what more brave, what more glorious! — And as your design is good, so the methods in which you have pursued it, are wise and just. Go on therefore in this blessed work, and God prosper you.

You are to be *exhorted* to look to your own sincerity: see that your lives are not the counterparts of those vices which you would reform in others: take care that you act upon

good principles: not only mean well, but endeavour to act wisely: use all precautions to guard against offence; and learn particularly to join a spirit of meekness with your zeal.

This is indeed a difficult thing thus to temper zeal; but the success of societies for reformation depends very much upon it: for if men appear to be acted by a proud and pharisaical or a peevish and sour spirit; the world will be ready to judge, that they are only beating down the Devil's kingdom in one part, to set it up the more effectually in another; and that with the filthiness of the spirit they are combating against that of the flesh. Let a meek and humble spirit therefore visibly appear in your whole conduct. Persist with a noble firmness of mind in this good work; and suffer not your courage to fail, neither slacken your industrious endeavours to conquer wickedness, tho' you meet with many discouragements, and run many hazards in so doing. You have met with slander and with cruel opposition; and I see no reason to expect you will meet with less from the present age: But faint not.

There are many arguments to encourage your perseverance, and to animate your zeal; which may likewise serve as considerations to stir up others to join with you in making head against vice, — I wish they might have this kindly effect upon *others*: however, let them not fail to quicken *your* resolution and diligence in attempting

tempting to stop the torrent of impiety and wickedness.

Consider, You are only striving against immorality and prophaneness: you only set yourselves to punish those crimes, which the wicked man's conscience must condemn him for. You are endeavouring to promote virtue and religion, in opposition to vice and impiety. A glorious contest this!

You must needs have the approbation of *your own* consciences in the affair: an inward pleasure and tranquillity of mind must result from a reflection on your zeal and activity in so good a work.

You may be assured of the approbation of that God, who is greater than conscience. He looks down from heaven, and observes with pleasure your zeal and concern for his honour and interest in the world. His approbation you may set against the revilings of the whole world.

The great *author and finisher of our faith*, Jesus Christ, cannot but approve of an undertaking so agreeable to his design of coming into this world. You are carrying on the same work in which your dear Redeemer is engaged, namely to *destroy the works of the Devil*, and to promote his kingdom amongst men. From him you may expect assistance and supports, in proportion to the difficulties and discouragements you meet with.

All *good* men wish well to you, and applaud your undertaking. The best men of every denomination concur in approving the cause of reformation: you have the generous contributions of *some*, actual labours and expence of time from *others*, and the hearty prayers of *all*. I apprehend I am not mistaken in saying *all* good men wish well to you: since that man, who speaks against, or disapproves of attempts for a national reformation, does in my opinion so far forfeit the character of a good man. I know indeed, there are some who profess religion and desire to be thought good people, that have not been willing to commend your pious confederacy, if they have not proceeded to discommend it: whether their character be good or bad, I will not enquire: I am sure their conduct is very criminal: if they are themselves free from open vice, I'll venture to say, they are too much void of that regard for God and religion, that love to their country, and that compassion for the souls of their fellow-creatures, which should inflame the heart of every good Christian. I must attribute such a behaviour and disposition towards your design, in men of appearing virtue and religion, chiefly to one or other of these causes. Either to their *ignorance*: they are not themselves well acquainted with your design and methods of proceeding, and hastily take up reports, it may be, from the whispers and representations of those,

those, whose vices you oppose — But this their way is their folly. — Or to their *cowardice*: they are afraid of the dangerous consequences, which may arise from attempts to curb the wicked. If this be their temper, you need be under no concern, that they do not join themselves to you; for if they did, their timorous fearful spirits might tend to render your endeavours less vigorous and successful. — Or to their *covetousness*: if they applaud your design, they reckon it will be expected they should contribute towards the defraying the necessary expences, which attend the execution of it; therefore they will appear not to approve of it, or to have some frivolous objections against your methods of proceeding, that so they may escape solicitations to part with their beloved pelf. But men of such stingy tempers are the worst members of any society, and the most insignificant creatures upon the face of God's earth: and therefore 'tis fittest they should live by themselves, since 'tis manifest they design only to live to themselves.

The whole *community* is unspeakably indebted to you. God has often blessed a nation for the sake of a few righteous men in it; and they have prevailed with him to stay his hand, when he was just giving the blow. The wicked may represent you as the *troubles of Israel*; but you are indeed as *the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof*; the strength, and glory of the nation;

tion; you are doing the highest service to the publick interest, by endeavouring to stem the tide of those abominable vices, under which the land groaneth, and which (if allowed and persisted in) threaten us with the most desolating judgments.

The *wicked* themselves, if reclaim'd, will bless God for you. You cannot expect, that while they are fond of their vices, they should approve your design, tho' all along you have their consciences on your side; but if by the methods you use, any should be brought to have truer notions of vice, and be converted from their sins, they will thank you, and bless God for you to all eternity. — And you are not to despair, but that you may see many loose and profane persons brought to themselves, and reclaimed from their evil ways. Some have already been recovered; and 'tis to be hoped by the Spirit of God concurring with your endeavours others will be also converted: the interest of virtue and religion shall flourish, while vice and profaneness by degrees lose ground.

But whatever the success be, *your reward is safe in heaven*: let the certain prospect of a future glorious recompence animate your attempts to reform a vicious age. *Your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord**: you may at present

1 Cor. xv. 58.

meet

meet with reproach, with cruel sufferings in the discharge of this work; but let *none of these things move* you; heaven will make you an infinite amends at last: and *in due time you shall certainly reap, if you faint not*: a happiness lasting as your natures, and large as your desires, is reserv'd for such as you.—I pray God we may all attain to it. *Amen.*

F I N I S.

meet with reproach, with cruel suffering in the
discharge of this work; but let none of these things
move you; heaven will make you an heir of
honours at last; and in due time you shall oc-
casionally reap, if you sown not: a happiness last-
ing as your nature and your station is. — I pray God we
may all attain to it.

F I N I S